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ABSTRACT

As part of the efforts of Sweden's Malmo School of Education's "Preparedness for Peace" project, this document presents a conversation with Paul Smoker. Smoker is director of the Richardson Institute for Conflict and Peace Research, University of Lancaster, England. He has a long history of involvement with peace research and peace studies. Smoker discusses his own background and the sources of his involvement in the peace studies movement. He explains how he interprets the term "peace education," how schools can teach the subject, and how British schools contribute to peace education. Smoker recounts his own military school background and how his interest in peace education set him apart from school colleagues. The paper includes notes about the interviewee, including a list of selected writings. (SG)

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Paul Smoker
and
The Project "Preparedness for Peace"

SO 021 829

March 1990

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IS IT RIGHT FOR A TEACHER TO BE BIASED - TOWARDS AVOIDANCE OF VIOLENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE?

A conversation on "peace education" and "education for peace" in a British context

Paul Smoker
and
The Project "Preparedness for Peace"

Smoker, P. & The Project "Preparedness for Peace". Is it right for a teacher to be biased - towards avoidance of violence and environmental damage? A conversation on "peace education" and "education for peace" in a British context. Reprints and Miniprints (Malmö, Sweden: School of Education), No. 691, 1990.

The project group "Preparedness for Peace" at the Malmö School of Education in Sweden studies ways of helping children and young people to deal constructively with questions of peace and war. As part of this work, experts with special interest and competence in areas related to peace education are interviewed.

This publication presents such a conversation with Paul Smoker, Director of The Richardson Institute for Conflict and Peace Research, University of Lancaster, with a long-time involvement in peace research and peace studies. - Interviewer: Åke Bjerstedt.

Keywords: Interview, multi-cultural education, peace education, peace research, teacher education.

PEACE EDUCATION: AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL SMOKER, RICHARDSON INSTITUTE FOR PEACE STUDIES, LANCASTER UNIVERSITY, ENGLAND

1.

AB: As an introduction, could you say a few words about yourself and your interest in the field of "peace education"?

PS: I came into peace research or peace studies in 1960. At the time I was studying to be a physicist, but I figured the world had enough physicists working with nuclear weapons. We were mainly concerned about the nuclear issue, so a group of us got together and started a peace research center in Lancaster in 1960. Initially, the motivation was the worry about nuclear war.

AB: Could you tell me a little more about your center?

PS: At that time a number of institutes had recently started: The Peace Research Institute in Oslo, The Center for Research on Conflict Resolution in Michigan; and the whole movement was just beginning to get going: The Journal of Conflict Resolution, The Journal of Peace Research. At that time - in Britain at least - nobody would have suggested doing peace studies in the university, and the idea of peace education in schools would have been considered quite ludicrous, communistic or unthinkable, I suppose in the same way as sex education in school would have been considered earlier. Over a period, however, the academic peace studies movement, the peace research movement developed, and now the center I work at is an established part of the University of Lancaster.

When the University of Lancaster came to be established in Lancaster, in 1965, we had an independent center going for five years, supported by pacifists, Quakers, peace movements, churches and others. The first Vice Chancellor of that university happened to be a Quaker who had been a conscientious objector during the Second World War, Charles Carter - now Sir Charles Carter.

He was also interested in the work of Richardson, and I had been working on Richardson's mathematical models at the peace research center in Lancaster. I used to make my living by playing the piano in a pub at week-ends, and during the week I would work on my peace research extending Richardson's models of arms race.

As a result of Charles Carter's initiative, we moved into the University and we've had a peace study program at Lancaster University ever since. It was the first university in Britain to include it in its program. It has always been a very small program with a small undergraduate course and with a small number of graduate research students doing masters or Ph.D's.

We are still supported mainly by the peace movement. We have "Friends of the Richardson Institute" - and there is about 170 of those; they are a mixture of Quaker meetings, churches, peace groups and some trusts and foundations, and they provide most of the money to support the institute. The university provides us with rooms, computer time and so on. We are still a very small institute.

2.

AB: What do you think of first when you hear the words "peace education"?

PS: In England, many people think differently about "peace education" and "education for peace". People who talk about "peace education" generally are talking about conveying a better understanding of theories, of information, of facts about problems of peace and war - it's an intellectual type of approach to the topic, which is the one that for the most part we have to adopt in universities and we do adopt in the university.

However, many people speak about "education for peace", and they think about having people in school get used to peace as a natural living experience in the classroom, focusing on the educational process,

the pedagogical principles involved. My own personal bias is towards that approach, and in a perfect world that is the approach I would like to do. I have been trained as a teacher, and I was then a student of the methods of A.S. Neill. I believed in his approach to education, with its emphasis on democratic experience in the classroom situation. But unfortunately, since we work in a less than ideal world, these principles are often difficult to carry out, for example, at the university although, in my own institute, we do discuss things, treat each other as equals, and as much as possible we try to take each others' views into account; it's not a hierarchical operation. So when I think about peace education, I think about these two different approaches to it and the advantages and disadvantages of both.

Recently we had to develop a syllabus for use in schools in Britain, a peace studies syllabus. It was a major break-through to get the examination bodies to consider that they could include such a syllabus in a curriculum for schools. The Joint Matriculation Board had agreed to do this. I've been working upon this project for about five years now - it took us some years to persuade them that this was a legitimate intellectual exercise, and now we are putting together a syllabus. This is "peace education", because the syllabus says nothing about how the teaching should be conducted in the classroom, about the spirit in the classroom, about the participation of students, but it talks about content. And obviously I personally am not terribly happy about that; but on the other hand, I realize that it would be quite impossible for me to get the Joint Matriculation Board to agree to the other approach, and I would rather have this than nothing.

There are many teachers who do not agree with this. They take the view that, in fact, peace education in this academic sense is not a good idea and are quite

strongly opposed to it. They argue that it gives a false idea of what the peace process is really about - that the peace process is really about good, personal relationships, about participating in the classroom, about democratic participation in life. They feel that the hidden curriculum involved in teaching peace, as if it were physics, is doing a disservice. I respect that view and in fact part of me, unfortunately, agrees with that. So I have mixed feelings about this. But on the other hand I do think there is a merit indeed in knowledge and intellectual understanding about problems of peace and war regardless of the way the classroom is organized.

3.

AB: If you think back on your own school days, were there some aspects in your schooling that might be considered an attempt at "peace education"?

PS: The grammar school I went to was a boy's school, a single sex school, and in my school it was expected that every boy joined the Combined Cadet Force - an Army training corps. In theory, it was not compulsory, but in fact it was; because it was the social-cultural norm that everybody joined in. It trained the boys to shoot rifles and introduced them into the military world. Of course, I joined quite unthinkingly. I am sure that the people who ran that saw it as a type of peace education, because they believed in peace through strength.

Then when I got involved with the peace movement I simply left. Unfortunately, at that time I was a chief cadet - I was the leading cadet - and this created an enormous upset in the school, because nobody had ever done this before. The fact that the chief cadet would leave the army corps, saying that he did not want to learn how to kill people any more came as a bit of a shock. So it could be that the training they gave in education was better than they thought -

but not from their point of view!

4.

AB: Do you believe that schools in your country, as you know them today, contribute to a "peace education"?

PS: Fortunately, I was involved in a project with Hanns-Fred Rathenow, where we did a survey of all the 125 local education authorities in the United Kingdom. Subsequently, we have had a graduate student, Alison Vickers, working on peace education, and she and I worked together on peace education in schools, trying to look at the attitudes of different teachers to the problem. So I have a certain amount of knowledge of what's going on in, at least in some of the schools, although I don't think anybody has a full understanding of what's going on across the board.

From that work with Alison Vickers and the work previously with Hanns-Fred Rathenow, I would say there are a number of schools in Britain who are doing quite a lot in the peace education area. If we just talk about peace education, that is, the approach where people are trying to convey facts, theories, understanding about problems of peace, we see that some teachers don't do this in classes which are called peace education. They may do this in lessons which are on civics, on religious education, on current affairs, history, geography, or a number of different other areas. A number of teachers argue that because of problems of time tabling (there are too many subjects already) or because of political problems (if they would say that they were teaching peace education, they would be severely reprimanded), they prefer to tackle the issues involved in peace education through the traditional disciplines, which are taught in the classroom. We found that roughly two to one take that view (of the sample we have looked at). There are also those who argue that there should be a specific subject called peace education.

When we looked at the sample of local education

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authorities, we found, I think, well over 60 % that said that either peace education or the topics covered by peace education were included in their schools, and our subsequent follow-up work in talking to teachers in different schools, showed, I think, that this is a fairly accurate figure. So I think that peace education is now alive in British schools anyway.

Its content varies from place to place. Obviously in Northern Ireland, for example, it tends to be more an emphasis upon the local conflict in Northern Ireland. In other parts of the country it might concentrate on some local community issues; it doesn't always concentrate on nuclear weapons, for example, or the relationships between states; it may look at conflict resolution related to a dispute between two sections of the community. Then it overlaps I think with multi-cultural education. But I think that it is fair to say that it has become now established in many British schools.

AB: What about the present attitude of the government?

PS: The government's public position is that they are very hostile to the notion of peace studies. It has been criticized in the House of Commons on a number of occasions by conservative MPs. For example, this advanced level syllabus we are developing has been attacked by a number of conservative MPs on the radio, even though they haven't seen the syllabus. Nobody has seen the syllabus yet, because we have spent a lot of time making sure that this syllabus is intellectually defensible. It is an intellectually defensible syllabus, and the members of the Joint Matriculation Board stand by it. They are also very anxious to maintain their independence in selecting topics they consider to be intellectually sound.

However, although the government is very hostile to peace studies in their public statements, it has helped establish peace studies in Northern Ireland in the New University of Ulster. This was because they are

anxious that peace studies in Northern Ireland should concentrate on the Irish problem. So there is a clear ambivalence in their attitude: On the one hand peace studies are seen as a communist plot or as leftist biased teaching, and on the other peace studies in Northern Ireland receives some support. In general, the government still is pretty hostile, but less than it was. It was worse about four or five years ago.

5.

AB: Do you think it is at all possible for schools to contribute to a "peace education"? If so, what are some of the steps and measures to be taken that you think of first?

PS: I do think it's possible if we are using the word peace education in a sense of imparting knowledge, understanding, theories about peace and conflict. The steps that can be taken depend in large part on the nature of the educational system. In Britain, qualifications are important. (I personally don't like qualifications. There is a hierarchical aspect of this which I find unpleasant. I feel people should study because they are interested in the topic.) But I recognize that in Britain qualifications are very important and it works two ways. Students benefit, and the subject itself benefits if a course is certified. So it is useful to have a course validated, accepted by an independent neutral examination board. So in the British context, I think that that's the sort of thing that schools can do.

But then of course there is the problem of teacher training. Teachers are so pushed, they are asked to do so much. My experience, which is limited, is that most teachers are very conscientious and very professional; they try to do their very best with the resources available. I think one of the problems for schools in introducing peace education is providing the teachers with adequate materials and with training-

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courses. I think the colleges of education and other such groups would be the ideal people to do this type of thing, to keep teachers informed about the subject and to help develop good materials that they can then use in the classroom situation.

AB: If you think of the steps and measures within the classroom that the individual teacher could do - what comes to your mind first?

PS: There are a lot of things that can be done. The ideal would be, of course, if you had teachers who had done a course in a Teacher Training College in this area and prepared themselves for such activities.

AB: When you started answering this question, I noted that you said: It is possible if you think of imparting knowledge, understanding etc. What about the other aspect - education for peace: Do you see this as possible also?

PS: That becomes controversial. Now I think, again in the British experience, that this is much more possible at the junior level. I was trained as a teacher to teach primarily younger children - children under the age of 11, and I prefer that. One of the reasons I prefer that was because I was allowed to do educationally interesting things, experimental work, experiential learning, group work. In Britain a lot of work has been done for education for peace: the Bristol project, the Avon project and others, and I think that it is still possible to do this at the younger level.

When you get to the older level this becomes very difficult to do in the official state schools. You can do it in special schools such as Summerhill, where related work has been done for about 40 or 50 years now. But in most state schools you would not be able to do this, partly because of the structure (most schools are primarily hiarchical, students are not part of the decision-making process etc.), partly because of political reasons (if you were trying to

do this, I think there would be an enormous amount of pressure on the teacher to stop doing it). I regret that very much because I actually feel that these two approaches can go along together perfectly well, and I prefer to do both.

6.

AB: What would be some of the possible differences in peace education approaches among younger and older students in schools? You might just have touched upon that.

PS: Yes, in a way. Because of the political and structural situation it is easier to use education for peace approaches among younger children. But I don't think that this is an intrinsic difference. I think the educational processes, if you are 10 years old or 90 years old, are essentially very similar. I personally and in an ideal world believe in the same education for peace approach at all levels and in society at large. But this is not the way the world is and therefore one tries to compromise and move the world in that direction.

7.

AB: If you were an upper-secondary school teacher in a subject with which you are particularly familiar, how would you like to make the students more conscious of and more prepared for problems of peace, within that subject? You talked of that you studied to be a physicist?

PS: Yes, but in school I used to teach mathematics and art. With art, I think I did make a genuine attempt to do this. I think one can use art to approach the problems of images of peace. If I was teaching art in school, I think that's one of the things I would do: I would - as I have done with students who have been doing Ph.D.s - go into the classroom and ask children to paint a picture of what their image of peace is.

Others would be requested to paint a picture of what their image of war is. You usually get a very revealing set of pictures in this way, related to male and female differences in the socializing process. So I think, if I was teaching art in a school, that's one of the things I would do. Art can also be used as a method for individual exploration in a therapeutic fashion. - If I was teaching mathematics, then I would try to introduce statistics at a global level and try to give the students a better picture of the planet as a whole in terms of, for example, the inequalities among people.

8.

AB: In international debates, the terms "disarmament education" and "peace education" have been used, in addition to some other related terms ("global education", "education for international understanding" etc.). Do you have any comments and preferences as to this terminology?

PS: Personally not a lot; no. I understand often why people use one term instead of another, and quite often this is because of the political context, the social context or the cultural context within which they are operating. I think it's very important to respect that so I try to be sensitive to that. If people are talking about global education rather than peace education, it may be to avoid a hostile reaction from other people that could actually interfere with the educational process.

AB: When you talk about this in your institute, what terms do you usually use?

PS: We teach a course in peace studies and it's called peace studies, and this is agreed to by the university. We also have strategic studies, we have defence studies, so if we didn't have peace studies, the place would look like it was run by the army. I am an old-time liberal in the sense that I believe you should be able

to teach anything at universities; there should be no taboos. Therefore I have defended my friends who teach defence studies and are paid by the British Defence Department. I personally don't agree with their view-point, but I agree absolutely with their right to have defence studies at the university.

9.

AB: In many countries, questions related to disarmament and peace are highly controversial. Would you expect some difficulties, for example with parents or other members of the community, when introducing peace education in schools? If so, what kind of difficulties? Do you see any way out of such problems?

PS: Yes, people do have difficulties if they are introducing peace education in schools. It's a hot potato. The difficulties are mainly caused by parents or politicians or members of the press who argue that peace education is biased, whereas other education is not. Now, I happen to believe that all education is biased; you show me unbiased education, and I will show you a square circle. I think that one can have an educational system in which many different biases are represented, and I am in favour of that, but I am unashmedly biased towards peace, avoidance of violence, elimination of structural violence and soforth. I think that it is wrong to defend peace education by saying it's neutral, as some people do. It is biased, but so is the teaching of all social subjects. Education is not independent of values and ethics. The thing is to get a good range of biases, and then people can decide for themselves. And that's my answer how to get out of the problems.

10.

AB: What needs to be done in teacher training in order to prepare future teachers more adequately for the area of "peace education"?

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PS: Well, I think we have touched upon that. I think there is a big need for teacher training colleges to develop a number of courses and approaches, both for "peace education" and for "education for peace". When I went to teacher college, I was very lucky in going to a new college that was very committed to the activity and participation approaches which I view as an integral part of education for peace. I think teacher colleges can develop teaching materials and try them out in classrooms, and make them widely available. They can provide things such as day courses, weekend courses, up-grading courses so that the teachers get introduced to this area. I am hoping this is going to happen in Britain, for example, when we get our A-level course ready.

AB: At the present time, what is the situation in teacher training? Are there plenty of courses of these types?

PS: No, there isn't. You could find an odd course here and there. The peace study center at St. Martins College, where David Hicks gave such courses, has recently closed.

AB: Why was that closed?

PS: A lack of support, generally. David Hicks has done wonderfully to maintain it for so long, in spite of difficult circumstances. So I think it is really important for the teacher training colleges to do what they can for peace education.

11.

AB: In many schools, the students represent a variety of nationalities and cultural backgrounds. To what extent would it be possible to use this fact as an aid in education for peace? Would you expect some difficulties in doing so?

PS: I think it can be used in that way. For example, in places like Bradford where there are many people from India or Sri Lanka and Pakistan, the problems of multi-cultural education and developing an educational

system for a multi-cultural society really become very sharp problems, and I think that these cultural problems really could be turned into cultural advantages. The diversity of the different cultures means that you have a much richer educational environment. I don't think it's just a question of "using" - I think it's a genuine and important part of peace education to help people from different cultural backgrounds not only to live together, but also to respect and honour each others' cultural traditions, which are equally valid. I think that it is a very important task for peace education. I would think it would be difficult, because there are enormous problems of racism, for example, and lack of adequate teaching materials. It may be difficult for teachers to deal with these problems because they may not be sufficiently conversant with the different cultural traditions of the students. It may be very demanding.

12.

AB: Sometimes the term "global survival" is used to refer to an area dealing both with the risks of nuclear war and with the risks of far-reaching environmental damage through pollution and overuse of resources. How do you look upon dealing with these two categories of risks together in school? Do you have any suggestions as to how the teacher could approach the problem area of environmental damage?

PS: Partly, I think, this depends upon the particular historical period. At the present time, it would be much easier for a teacher to deal with the problems of environmental damage in schools in Britain than it would be to deal with the problems of the risk of a nuclear war. And this is because the media and the newspapers currently are very concerned and focused on the problems in the environment. At the present time the problems of a nuclear war are just not featured in the media - it's no longer a problem in

the eyes of the media. Therefore, when children go home and see the television and the newspapers, they are getting environmental messages loud and clear, and therefore at the present time, I think it would be very easy to deal with that.

But linking it with nuclear war should also be done as part of the educational process, through such things as the consequences of what would happen with a nuclear war. The students should be aware of the environmental changes, climatic changes, the nuclear winter notion and soforth. They also need to deal with the idea of human beings and their relationship to nature and the ethical questions related to this, such as whether it is defensible to threathen to destroy millions of animals as well using nuclear weapons.

AB: You have yourself worked with the concept of accidental nuclear war. Would that be something that you also could think of using in school?

PS: I certainly would. In the A-level course that we introduce, we have a section dealing with the nuclear issue which looks at the history of the development of nuclear weapons, how strategy about nuclear weapons is developed, and the arguments for and against nuclear weapons. In the arguments against nuclear weapons we include the notion that there is a risk of very serious accident. Can you justify the present policy given the nature of the risk. Yes, I certainly would include those, because I still feel that this is a very serious problem. The problem of an accidental nuclear war is at the present time more serious than the problem of deliberate nuclear war. It may change if we have nuclear prolification. Then maybe a deliberate nuclear war could once again become a major problem. At the present time we have included this in our A-level course.

In the past, in all the peace studies courses I have taught, I have always included both the nuclear issue and the environmental issue. I have been doing

that for at least 20 years now, and it's essential because both of them have to do with quality of life and both affect the number of people who die on the planet. The number of people from the third world who are starving to death is appalling, and this is an environmental problem, it's a food problem, and a distribution problem, but it's also a problem of the way we organize society, so the interdepentence of peace and environmental issue is nothing new, as most of us know who worked in this field, and it will continue to be included in peace study courses. Many of the peace studies courses now include the global issues and obviously, have to deal with global survival. Major questions are: What do we do in order for this planet to survive, and how do we develop environments in which human beings can live good valuable meaningful lives. Peace is not just about the absence of nuclear war as we know. This is how I always have dealt with these questions and I will continue to do so.

NOTES ON THE INTERVIEWEE

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Paul Smoker was born in London, England on the 23rd September 1938. After leaving school he studied physics, mathematics, art and educational theory. In 1960 he helped to establish the Peace Research Centre at Langthwaite House, Lancaster where he worked until the Centre became a part of the new University of Lancaster in 1965. Since then he has been based at Lancaster teaching Peace Studies. He has been a visiting professor teaching peace studies at various universities in the United States, Canada, Europe and Asia.

He has published books and articles on various topics including conflict theory, the nuclear arms race, simulation of international relations, peace movements, peace education, utopias and peace theory. Currently he edits the International Peace Research Newsletter and is visiting professor of International Peace Studies in the Faculty of International Relations, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan.

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